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ABSTRACT

This document describes the National Pilot Sites Project for Recruitment and Retention, an effort to recruit, prepare, and retain highly qualified diverse educators and related services personnel for children and youth with disabilities by involving multiple stakeholder groups within selected states (Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, New Jersey, Oregon, and Texas) in issues of special education workforce development. It explains the development of the Collaborative Practices Model underlying the project. For the project's first year, the report explains the roles and responsibilities of both the National Clearinghouse on Professions in Special Education and the pilot sites, the relevance of site visits by Clearinghouse staff to pilot sites, and the development of public service announcements (PSAs). The report describes the project's second year process of getting PSAs broadcast, adding additional pilot sites, and using project evaluation as feedback for improvement. Supports that pilot sites received, both from the Clearinghouse and the business community, are delineated. The report concludes with nine suggested action steps for others interested in implementing a statewide collaborative recruitment initiative. (DB)

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Developing the Special Education Workforce

ED 477 114

THE ROAD TO TOMORROW'S TEACHERS

PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND EVALUATING A STATE-BASED SPECIAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Lessons Learned from the National Pilot Sites Project for Recruitment and Retention

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The Road to Tomorrow's Teachers

Planning, Implementing and Evaluating a State-based Special Education Workforce Development Initiative

Lessons Learned from the National Pilot Sites Project for Recruitment and Retention

Introduction

While special education teacher shortages have plagued states and localities for years, the shortages have now reached crisis proportions. During the past five-year period, all states in the nation reported serious shortages of special education classroom teachers and select related services personnel. (American Association of Employment in Education, Annual Supply and Demand Studies, 1997-2001). Local school districts are often forced to fill special education teacher positions with untrained long-term substitutes and emergency licensed personnel.

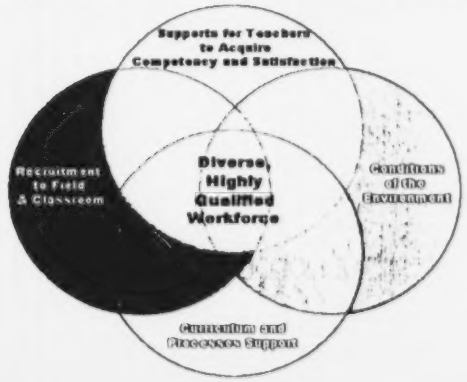
The variables that contribute to the existence of such a national crisis are numerous and complex and do not lend themselves to being addressed with a single approach. Rather, multiple and coordinated efforts are necessary, efforts that must grow from collaborations of multiple key stakeholders.

The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education (Clearinghouse) is uniquely positioned to help foster such necessary collaborations. Funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and operated by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the project's mission is to enhance the nation's capacity to recruit, prepare, and retain highly-qualified diverse educators and related services personnel for children and youth with disabilities. The cooperative agreement between OSEP and CEC includes the expectation that the Clearinghouse undertake a pilot project focused on recruitment and retention strategies and that public service announcements (PSA's) that reach unique sets of individuals be a part of that project. Given this expectation and the Clearinghouse focus on special education workforce development, the National Pilot Sites Project for Recruitment and Retention (Pilot Sites Project) was born.

Framework for Workforce Development

Simultaneous to the initiation of the Pilot Sites Project, the Clearinghouse conducted a review of literature on attrition and retention of special educators, conditions of the environments in which special educators work, recruitment practices to the field and to the classroom, standards for preparation to teach, induction programs, continuing professional development, and federal commitments to developing teacher quality. The review revealed the ineffectiveness of stakeholders working within isolated processes when tackling the complexities of systemic changes needed to develop a highly qualified, diverse special education workforce. The Collaborative Practices Model for developing diverse, highly qualified special educators, seen below, evolved from the insights of that review.

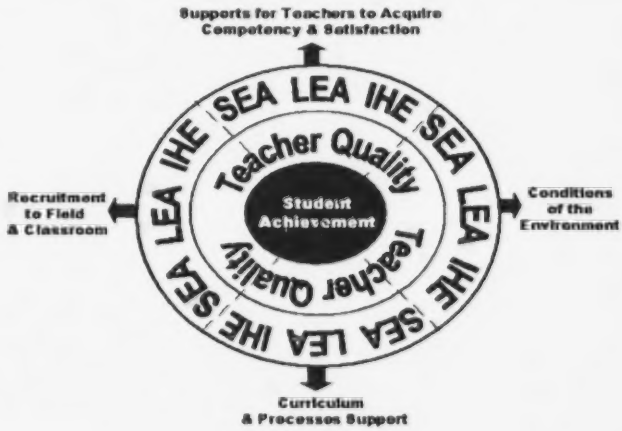
Collaborative Practices that Support the Development of a Diverse, Highly Qualified Special Education Workforce


Supports for Teachers to Acquire Competency and Satisfaction
Recruitment to Field & Classroom
Diverse, Highly Qualified Workforce
Conditions of the Environment
Curriculum and Processes Support

The Collaborative Practices Model acknowledges the interrelation of four components in developing a diverse, highly qualified workforce.

- Recruitment to the Field and to the Classroom
- Supports for Teachers to Acquire Competency and Satisfaction
- Conditions of the Environment
- Curriculum and Processes Support

As important as the interaction is among these components, the collaboration among state departments of education, institutions of higher education, and local school districts in addressing together all the components is essential. Each of these agencies has a responsibility to consider all components and its contribution to them as planning is undertaken, activities implemented, and goals achieved.


Supports for Teachers to Acquire Competency & Satisfaction
SEA LEA IHE
Teacher Quality
Student Achievement
Recruitment to Field & Classroom
Conditions of the Environment
Curriculum & Processes Support

The stated purpose of the Pilot Sites Project was to provide multiple stakeholder groups within selected states the opportunity to address issues of special education workforce development. Although the Collaborative Practices Model did not itself drive the development of the Pilot Sites Project, the Model's conceptual framework was fundamental to the guidance that the Clearinghouse provided to the Pilot Sites. Collaborative partnerships within the Pilot Sites included:

- State Department of Education/ Department of Special Education
- Institutions of higher education faculty
- Local school districts
- Related professional organizations
- Businesses
- Parent/disability advocacy groups
- Other invested groups

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By creating partnerships that reflected the Collaborative Practices Model, the Clearinghouse believed that personnel shortages could be addressed more comprehensively and effectively. Thus, one of the key variables in selecting pilot sites would be the willingness and capacity of key stakeholder groups in a state to form collaborative partnerships.

Throughout the Clearinghouse journey with the pilot sites, many lessons have been learned. The Road to Tomorrow's Teachers is bumpy and circuitous, and the Clearinghouse learned lessons in the value of developing collaborative relationships among partners who had not worked together before or thought about marketing the field of special education. This booklet summarizes the route that the Pilot Sites Project took. We describe how the pilot sites were selected and how the Clearinghouse helped the pilot sites envision data collection systems. We explain the roles and responsibilities of both the Clearinghouse and the pilot sites, the relevance of site visits that Clearinghouse staff made to pilot sites, and how PSA's were developed. Following the Pilot Sites Project into its second year, we describe the process of getting PSA's on the air, adding additional pilot sites, and using project evaluation as feedback for improvement. Supports that pilot sites received, both in terms of Clearinghouse materials and from the business community, are delineated. Finally, we reflect on the challenges of developing and implementing the Pilot Sites Project and offer nine action steps that can be used by others interested in implementing a statewide recruitment initiative that focuses on collaboration within a wide stakeholder group.

THE ROAD TO TOMORROW'S TEACHERS IS BUMPY AND CIRCUITOUS, AND THE CLEARINGHOUSE LEARNED LESSONS IN THE VALUE OF DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

When we first began the work of creating the Pilot Sites Project, and even in its early implementation stages, we believed that the developmental stages were unique to this project. We realized ultimately that what we learned was perhaps not situation-specific at all. We feel that the story that we have to tell – the story of the stages of the Pilot Sites Project – has potential as a tool for other states and agencies interested in pursuing a collaborative mission to increase the number of high quality, diverse special education professionals to teach and support students with disabilities. Therefore, we present our story with the expectation that, by sharing it, others may benefit from its lessons.

Project Planning and Recruitment of Project Participants

In summer 1999, as the planning phase for the Pilot Sites Project began, the Clearinghouse identified issues relevant to workforce development in special education. As a consequence, three goals were identified to guide the Project :

- Increase the number of qualified diverse professionals in the special education workforce,
- Act as a testing ground for the implementation of a recruitment and retention strategy involving the use of televised PSA's, and
- Help various partners in each state build capacity to address the professional shortages that exist in their states and regions.

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In addition to the resulting goals, four factors emerged as essential to collaborative partnerships that would address workforce needs in a state. Ultimately these factors were used to create a matrix from which potential Pilot Sites were identified:

- Capacity to create partnerships among the state department of education, college and university special educator preparation programs, and local school districts,
- Demographic need,
- Interest in, and commitment to, recruitment and retention of highly qualified diverse special educators, and
- Access to crucial funding sources, i.e., U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) grants; State Improvement Grants; Title II (Higher Education Act) Teacher Quality Enhancement and Teacher Recruitment/Partnership Grants; and other state-supported grants or initiatives that develop the special education workforce

ISSUES OF CERTIFICATION AND LICENSURE, ACCELERATED PREPARATION PROGRAMS, INCREASED FIELD EXPERIENCES, AND SUPPORTS FOR NEW TEACHER INTERNS FROM BOTH HIGHER EDUCATION AND LOCAL DISTRICTS WERE DISCUSSED AT LENGTH DURING THESE ORGANIZATIONAL SITE VISITS

The identification of funding sources within a state was crucial. In the Spring of 1999 and in response to the nation's severe teacher shortage, the U.S. Department of Education awarded certain states and colleges and universities grants that were designed to address recruitment, preparation, and retention of teachers, including special education professionals. These grants were funded through both Title II and OSEP. Those funded through Title II were known as Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, Teacher Recruitment Grants, and Teacher Partnership Grants. Those funded through OSEP were personnel preparation grants and State Improvement Grants. These fiscal resources were the result of a state agency or institution of higher education demonstrating interest, initiative, and capacity to address the issues of recruitment and retention of special education and related services personnel. These grants proved an important resource in the development of the Pilots Sites; and, ultimately, Pilot Site participants within states facilitated the integration of these multiple funding sources.

Using the OSEP Personnel Preparation Grants database, other federal grant award lists discussed above, demographic profiles, state supply and demand reports, and personal communications, Clearinghouse staff identified six states (Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, New Jersey, Oregon, and Texas) as having a confluence of essential factors. Potential partners within a state emerged as federal regional resource centers, university systems, higher education councils, institutions of higher education, state departments of education, state regional resource centers, parent advocacy centers, and local educational agencies. Creating linkages that were both meaningful and productive among the state department of education, institutions of higher education, and local school districts would be a large part of the Pilot Sites Project.

After identifying the six states where a constellation of desirable factors existed, the Clearinghouse extended invitations to participate in the Pilot Sites Project. State departments of education were an integral part of any coalition among

federally funded projects, institutions of higher education in a state, and local school districts. As a result, efforts to determine levels of interest included letters to state department of education staff, OSEP personnel preparation grant administrators, and other state and federal resources that were involved in projects addressing recruitment, preparation, and retention in that state. The letter asked for the recipients' reactions to the proposal to become a Pilot Site Project participant and for any information or suggestions they might have regarding similar initiatives being undertaken by either colleges/universities or school districts in their state. Ultimately all six states agreed to participate.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Clearinghouse

Clearinghouse staff assumed an active partnership role with each of the six pilot sites, bringing expertise and resources in the following areas:

- Knowledge of issues and research relevant to special education workforce development
- Technical assistance regarding the development of collaborative partnerships,
- Collection and analysis of data on the effectiveness of targeted marketing strategies, and
- Development and dissemination of media products targeting specific audiences, according to state-specific needs.

In order to best advise pilot sites regarding the development and dissemination of media products, the Clearinghouse used results from market research conducted by a marketing research firm that specializes in educational consumer research. This market research study was one of the stated objectives of the Cooperative Agreement and was accomplished in the early months of the project. The study included in-person interviews with both consumers and professionals in the field, a series of focus groups with experienced special educators and preservice teachers, and individual telephone interviews. As a result of this research, Clearinghouse staff were able to offer advice and guidance to the pilot sites regarding the kinds of media that should be used to communicate state-level messages regarding special education personnel shortages, suggested formats for the messages (i.e., words and visual images that might enhance the power of the message), and the match between the formats of specific messages with various targeted audiences.

Roles and Responsibilities of Pilot Sites

The primary recruitment strategy used and evaluated within the Pilot Sites Project was a series of professionally produced PSA's shown on local and regional television stations in targeted areas of each state. This series was designed to recruit interested persons into either special education personnel preparation programs or directly into classrooms and was offered free to each pilot site. The PSA's took the form of 30-second television spots and included a toll-free telephone number that enabled viewers to learn more about special education personnel preparation programs in their state.

In exchange for use of the free PSA's, pilot sites were expected to collect data on the number of persons entering special education preparation programs as a result of the PSA's. Data collection was to include the number of applications submitted to personnel preparation programs over select periods of time, enrollment in those programs, and program completion rates. Pilot sites were to report the data by race/ethnicity and

gender. Later in the project period, pilot sites would be expected to collect data on the percentage of graduating students who had entered special education-related professions and their retention rates in school districts during their first three years of professional practice.
The story of the pilot site project, along with this evaluation data, would be shared via presentations and meetings at national conferences. Selected pilot site participants would be given opportunities to co-write and co-present on the Pilot Site Project story.

Year 1

State-Specific Action Plans

During the first twelve months of the Pilot Sites Project, three site visits were made to each of the state sites by Clearinghouse staff. During these site visits, state department of education staff that often included Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) staff, federal and state regional resource center staff, IHE faculty, parent advisory board members and local school district administrators came together. They discussed issues of supply and demand, state policy, higher education programming, and school district hiring and retention practices, specific to each of the states. Issues of certification and licensure, accelerated preparation programs, increased field experiences, and supports for new teacher interns from both higher education and local districts were discussed at length during these organizational site visits. Often, it was the first time these new partners had come face to face to discuss barriers and strategies for solutions to the quality/quantity crisis that existed in all of their states.

These meetings quickly developed into discussions about recruitment and retention strategies that were already being implemented in their states and ideas for additional ones that, with assistance from the Pilot Sites Project, might further impact both quantity and quality of new special educators. Discussions included strategies that were either already being implemented within the IHE personnel preparation programs or could be implemented with the assistance of newly developed linkages among pilot site participants. For instance, in Alabama and Colorado the state's involvement with the Pilot Sites Project either led to or coincided with a statewide summit on recruitment and retention of qualified diverse professionals in the field of special education.

As the Clearinghouse staff began planning with states, it became apparent that there was a need for several states to address issues related to data collection and data systems to track the demographics of the workforce before planning for the recruiting, preparing, and retaining of high quality diverse special educators could move forward. Development of these systems would require strategic and collaborative efforts on the part of federal, state, and local communities.

In assisting states to address the issues associated with these data systems, the Clearinghouse used the following databases that it houses and maintains:

- Financial resources (i.e., OSEP personnel preparation grants, State Improvement Grants, research projects)
- Supply and demand data in individual states and nation-wide
- Personnel preparation opportunities for a variety of special education professions

- National data on special education personnel needs

Additionally, in order for states to create their statements of personnel needs, data specific to the participation of persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds had to identified. These data included successful recruitment/retention strategies used by university partnership programs focused on increasing the number of culturally and linguistically diverse persons in special education professions. Consequently, the Clearinghouse identified the following questions as particularly relevant to states' data collection processes:

- Why do persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds **not** choose education, and more specifically special education, as a career?
- Are there mentoring and induction programs that increase the quality and quantity of special education personnel from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
- What is the impact of current federal and state policies on recruitment and retention of educators from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
- What are the most powerful strategies we might use to recruit persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds into the special education workforce?

These questions were helpful in focusing states' personnel needs towards issues of diversity within the special education workforce.

The Development of Public Service Announcements (PSA's)

Originally, the Clearinghouse committed to providing PSA's for each state in the Project. The plan was for six PSA's to be developed using each state's specific profile of supply and demand needs and audience marketing plans. The Clearinghouse would pay production, filming, reproduction, and distribution costs for the PSA's.

However, as representatives of key stakeholder groups at each site visit meeting began to discuss current state-level needs, it became apparent that all six states shared similar views of what their state's PSA might look like. Each state was interested in finding ways to increase the number of individuals enrolling in special education teacher preparation programs from the following groups:

FOUR FACTORS EMERGED AS ESSENTIAL TO COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS THAT WOULD ADDRESS WORKFORCE NEEDS IN A STATE:

1. CAPACITY TO CREATE PARTNERSHIPS
2. ACCESS TO CRUCIAL FUNDING SOURCES
3. DEMOGRAPHIC NEED
4. INTEREST IN, AND COMMITMENT TO, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED DIVERSE SPECIAL EDUCATORS

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- ⌘ Persons from rural and urban settings,
- ⌘ Persons from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds,
- ⌘ Paraprofessionals,
- ⌘ Males,
- ⌘ Nontraditional students, and
- ⌘ Mid-career changers.

As a result, a mutually supported decision was made to produce four different PSA's that all states could use. Each PSA would address the content issues specific to mid-career changers, rural settings, urban settings, and the specific attributes of special educators. All four PSA's would emphasize persons from diverse backgrounds and also target paraprofessionals and males. The PSA that focused on the specific attributes of special educators would be translated into Spanish creating a fifth PSA. All PSA's would be closed-captioned. Pilot sites would have access to all five of the PSA's and would be free to use any combination of them in addressing their state-level needs.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN BUSINESS AND EDUCATION COMMUNITIES CAN OFFER DESPERATELY NEEDED SOLUTIONS TO STATES THAT ARE SEEKING TO ESTABLISH A BALANCE BETWEEN THE ISSUES OF FUNDING AND TIME INVESTMENT RELATED TO TEACHER RECRUITMENT

Plans were made to air the PSA's on local television stations in both urban and rural communities in each of the six pilot sites. A toll-free telephone number, set-up and funded by the Clearinghouse, was announced via a "tag line" at the end of each PSA. Callers using the toll-free telephone number were routed to a central phone line in each of the six pilot sites, where information on special education personnel preparation programs within the state was provided. Colleges and universities that used the PSA's to recruit students to their programs agreed to collect data, over a period of years, regarding student's progress through personnel preparation programs, and then into the special educator workforce.

Year 2

Adding Additional Pilot Sites

Eighteen months after the start of the Pilot Sites Project, the decision was made to add three additional pilot sites to the project. Colleagues in Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio had approached the Clearinghouse about participating as pilot sites. Two of these states had previously worked with the Clearinghouse on state-wide efforts to address their needs for recruiting and retaining special education and related services personnel. Content and operational goals for the three new pilot sites

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would be the same as those for the original six. Thus, adding the three additional pilot sites served to positively increase learning opportunities for all.

With the addition of the new sites, Clearinghouse staff found opportunities to build on state-based collaborative partnerships that were already functioning within those states. This expansion also brought about additional opportunities to consider issues related to teacher education reform, licensing requirements, and increasing accessibility for mid-career changers. There was continued emphasis on inclusion of programs that targeted persons from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the new sites, also.

For example, in North Carolina, a Cooperative Planning Council, comprised of representatives of the special education teacher preparation programs in the state, met on a regular basis. Members discussed topics such as coursework requirements for distance learning programs, development of a list of courses that could be taken at any community college and transferred to state-level teacher training programs, and state certification requirements.

In turn, the Pilot Sites Project aided the preexisting and on-going work of North Carolina's Cooperative Planning Council by asking, as a requirement of participating in the project, that state-level teacher training programs devise ways to accommodate nontraditional students via more accessible course scheduling, more flexible entry requirements, and the creation of program supports to enhance student retention.

Florida also entered the Pilot Sites Project with an existing network of statewide collaborative linkages, of which the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) personnel took the lead. Regional partnerships among local school districts were strong, and special education teacher preparation programs served as an information dissemination network to first engage new partners and to later coordinate and monitor related activities on a regional basis.

Renewed Efforts for PSA Airing

During the second year of the Pilot Sites Project, it was necessary for the Clearinghouse to revisit several of the six original pilot sites in order to examine additional means of securing air time for the PSA's. In Alabama, it was agreed that a larger television audience could be pursued by collaborating with the state Cable Network Organization whose members are the owners of independently operated cable stations. A meeting, which was attended by the state department of education's public relations and communications staff among others, was held to discuss such a collaboration. Several positive outcomes resulted from the meeting: the PSA's would be aired state-wide via independent cable stations and the PSA's would be featured at the next state superintendent's weekly press conference. As a result of that press conference, a newspaper article describing the PSA's and the work of the Pilot Sites Project appeared in newspapers throughout the state. In other original pilot sites, meetings were held to consider new ways to disseminate the PSA's and to brainstorm additional collaborative relationships that might result in increased PSA visibility. In Texas, at least two news stories aired in major urban media markets, giving the Pilot Sites Project substantially increased public exposure.

Use of Project Evaluation as Feedback for Improvement

Long-range plans for all nine of the pilot sites participating in the Pilot Sites Project included the increasingly refined use of data collection and record keeping systems, which are integral to the process of evaluation and ongoing project planning. Such plans included the documentation of a variety of information variables to evaluate overall impact of recruitment activities, including increased enrollment in personnel preparation programs, increased teacher hires, available resources, and collaborating partners.

Clearinghouse staff used evaluative feedback to identify three successful strategies that emerged from the first year of the Pilot Sites Project. These three strategies guided the planning and activities of the second year of the project.

1. Challenge partners to work harder on "what's working."

Emphasizing this strategy often fostered project momentum. For example, one goal of the second year of the project was to challenge institutions of higher education to take responsibility for student follow-through (support through induction/first year of teaching) and student follow-up (ongoing data collection in collaboration with local school district personnel offices). In order to make this goal a reality, it was necessary to challenge local school districts to be aggressive but accommodating in partnering with neighboring colleges and universities regarding the creation of such processes.

> OFTEN, IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THESE NEW PARTNERS HAD COME FACE TO FACE TO DISCUSS BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR SOLUTIONS TO THE QUALITY/QUANTITY CRISIS THAT EXISTED IN ALL OF THEIR STATES.

2. Challenge surrounding communities to take an active role in partnering with the project.

The largest teacher preparation program in Texas has partnered for many years with its nearby local school districts and served as an example within this challenge. Using retired special education directors from surrounding communities to supervise interns practicing as full-time classroom teachers, the directors supervise an intensive and supportive second year internship experience within the university's OSEP funded two-year accelerated academic masters program for mid-career changers. This university preparation program has a retention rate for its graduates of more than 95 percent after three years in the classroom.

3. Build on accomplishments made by partner groups during the first year of the project.

During Year 2, the Clearinghouse was presented with an opportunity in Texas to become involved in the Teacher Recruitment Campaign Planning Committee. Such involvement facilitated contacts with major power and monetary resources within the state and catapulted the Pilot Sites Project into a more comprehensive, state-wide "all-teacher" recruitment initiative. In addition, the experience of working with large stakeholder groups expanded the knowledge of Clearinghouse staff relative to the ways in which states can build capacity to address teacher workforce development.

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Support Materials

As the Pilot Sites Project moved into its second year it became apparent that a new set of print materials needed to be developed for use in responding to recruitment initiatives that were in place within the pilot sites. Thus, the Recruitment Tool Kit was created, containing three different brochures focusing on the special education profession and financial aid, a poster that presented attributes of a special educator, and a Clearinghouse business card which highlighted the Clearinghouse website. The Recruitment Tool Kit was available to all Pilot Sites but also was sent to an additional 3,600 recruitment partners in all 50 states. These partners included the following groups:

- High school counselors in urban public school settings,
- University career placement officers,
- Deans of colleges of education/special education department chairs,
- OSEP personnel preparation grant administrators, and
- Student CEC club sponsors.

This additional set of resources began a new phase of recruitment products that now accompanies the PSAs as the Clearinghouse continues its work in states outside of the Pilot Sites Project to create comprehensive media recruitment campaigns.

Support from Resources Outside of Education

Partnerships between business and education communities have often contributed to the development of the nation's teacher workforce. These partnerships can offer desperately needed solutions to states that are seeking to establish a balance between the issues of funding and time investment related to teacher recruitment. Pilot Sites Project participants also engaged in business partnerships, as described here:

- Activities associated with Alabama's State Improvement Grant (SIG), which included a partnership with the Alabama Business Council, were integrated into the Alabama's Pilot Sites Project initiative. Such collaborations resulted in the creation of a recruitment brochure that promoted the advantages of teaching in Alabama, including highlights regarding Alabama quality of life.
- The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction was instrumental in engaging the participation of the North Carolina Business Leadership Council on a Teacher Recruitment Planning Committee, which addressed issues related to shortages of both regular education and special education teachers. The committee worked to identify community and statewide resources that could be targeted for activities associated with teacher recruitment.
- In Texas, the state Teacher Recruitment Planning Committee identified recommendations for recruitment and retention initiatives that included the use of the PSAs and is seeking funding for the implementation of those recommendations from major corporations and foundations that have interests in education-related projects.
- The Clearinghouse itself engaged the support of CEC's on-line recruitment service partner, Teachers-Teachers.com. Wrap-around services were created through this partnership to help states distribute the Clearinghouse PSA's and print materials in their high schools and community colleges.

Conclusions/Reflections on the Process of Developing the Pilot Sites Project

The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education has used the Pilot Sites Project to accomplish a significant component of its mission regarding increasing the nation's capacity to recruit, prepare, and retain a qualified, diverse special education workforce. The project opened lines of communication within and across states that, heretofore, had not been used in addressing recruitment issues of special education personnel.

While data related to the impact of the project on recruitment of teachers are not conclusive, important lessons can be drawn from the experience of the Pilot Sites Project. Perhaps the most important is the need to ensure that sufficient statewide capacity and interest exist prior to embarking on the creation of recruitment and retention initiatives. Without necessary capacity and interest, states cannot fully own, support, and maintain the activities associated with such initiatives. The pilot sites that reaped the least benefit from the Pilot Sites Project were those that failed to develop full ownership of project initiatives, characterized by minimal buy-in, low levels of participation, and early abandonment of the project as a whole.

> (IN FLORIDA) REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AMONG LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS WERE STRONG, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS SERVED AS AN INFORMATION DISSEMINATION NETWORK TO FIRST ENGAGE NEW PARTNERS AND TO LATER COORDINATE AND MONITOR RELATED ACTIVITIES ON A REGIONAL BASIS.

Site participants that did take ownership of the project early on and provided avenues for its implementation were much more successful in engaging others in the state to join in project implementation. A state-level participant who acted as a liaison between the project and other state participants and shepherded the project was an invaluable resource. In states where such a liaison emerged, or was designated, the project moved forward, participants were kept engaged, and ways were found to relate project activities to other similar state-wide initiatives, such as legislative issues and higher education agendas. Such crossover continually strengthened and validated the mission and activities of the Pilot Sites Project within the frameworks of the other state-level initiatives.

Keeping special education workforce development issues at the forefront of many different simultaneous state-wide agendas was key in building state-wide momentum and in securing involvement from a wide group of stakeholders. For example, constant efforts were necessary in order to keep both press and television media focused on featuring stories related to special education personnel shortages. In fact, one of the greatest challenges of the Pilot Sites Project was finding ways to get the PSA's aired on local television stations in highly competitive markets and to keep them airing on a regular basis over a period of months. Reaching out to members of the business community regarding the initiatives of the Pilot Sites Project and securing their involvement as equal participants proved to be the most valuable strategy in addressing this particular challenge.

Clearly, many communities have both the interest and resources necessary to create and sustain initiatives similar to those undertaken in the Pilot

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Sites Project. However, multiple players must be engaged and willing to contribute on an ongoing basis for an extended period of time in order for the goal of increasing numbers of highly qualified, diverse special education personnel to be realized. Finding the right combination of resources and manpower to plan and implement such a project is the first step, followed by sustaining its efforts and measuring its impact.

Action Steps for Implementing a Statewide Recruitment and Retention Initiative

Specific action steps for forming collaborative partnerships to address the complex issues in developing a highly qualified diverse special education workforce are briefly discussed below.

1. Ensure that your efforts are in response to the identified need of a large group of stakeholders.

The first step in implementing any statewide initiative is to make sure that what you are planning is of utmost importance to those from whom you will be seeking resources and support. The need must be as critical to those who are involved in the initiative as it is to you. Choose partners carefully, making sure to focus on the needs of the communities that you involve in the partnership. Your partnerships should include those with whom you have already established a collaborative working relationship.

2. Identify internal resources related to funding, data collection capabilities, and personnel capacity-building.

In order for state-based partnerships to be effective, a thorough inventory of both internal and external resources must be initiated. Internal resources include sources of state education funds and state-based businesses interested in supporting educational personnel issues. External resources include federal funds that target personnel development, e.g., Title II HEA-Teacher Quality Enhancement Grants, Gear-Up Awards, OSEP-funded grants for personnel preparation, State Improvement Grants, Transition to Teaching Grants, NCLB funds and nationally based businesses interested in educational personnel issues.

In order to set and meet fundamental goals, states must also be able to identify available data and data systems that can provide information on workforce need. In its evaluation of the 18 SIG proposals received by OSEP in fall 1999, the Federal Resource Center noted that data collection issues addressed in proposals included those related to improving capacity to anticipate future personnel needs via the collection and analysis of relevant data.

Once these data collection capabilities are in place, state partnerships can address the most critical need areas, whether they are recruitment, preparation, or retention of personnel.

3. Plan for implementation by identifying:

- *players with authority and resources,*
- *organizations with access to additional resources, and*
- *contextual needs of the community as well as of individual participants.*

Planning for participant buy-in should focus on getting the right players with the right resources and abilities to address the goals of your initiatives. Focus on inviting those that have authority and influence over the issues you will be addressing, as well as those who are in need of the resources you will be seeking. Bringing together the "haves" and the "have-nots" is a very effective strategy in partnership building. Make sure you have also invited those that represent the business and social institutions of the community. Asking for their input and collaboration is often the first step in developing successful partnerships, especially in communities where the foundations of your initiatives are not well established.

4. Be aggressive in recruiting partners by:

- *offering something they need in return for their participation,*
- *using one organization's participation to leverage another's, and*
- *going after the recognized leaders first, so the others will follow.*

Soliciting participation in a project that is based on collaborative partnerships requires the use of marketing strategies that address political, social, and economic considerations. Relevant strategic planning requires that you make sure those that you are including understand and relate to one another's needs. Make sure you have something to offer that partners will want and need. Solicit full participation and leadership from the larger, more influential potential partners – local businesses, higher education institutions, and local school districts. Understand their influence on the community and the partnerships they already have in order to make the most of your collaborations. Ask these major players to solicit other business and education partners who may be reluctant to come on board first.

5. Build collaborative partnerships by:

- *facilitating ongoing communication among partners,*
- *creating equal opportunities for sharing of resources, and*
- *securing buy-in through equitable responsibility and ongoing accountability.*

Once partnerships have been established, you will need to ensure that necessary infrastructure is in place to allow for ongoing communication, equal opportunities for sharing, and equitable responsibility and accountability for the initiatives as a whole. Lack of communication can be a major stumbling block when building a collaborative partnership. Use technology to facilitate communication and keep partners interacting with one another on an ongoing basis. Make effective use of email communication and conference calling when partners are distanced from one another geographically. Should a "have not" member not have access to technology and also be located in a geographic region apart from

other partners, perhaps a "have" partner who has access to more resources can contribute technology assistance, both in terms of hardware and training, so that all partners can communicate with each other.

Such partnership building efforts are essential to the second and third tenets of this action step – creating equal opportunities for the sharing of resources and securing buy-in through equitable responsibility and ongoing accountability. Balancing the power and influence of the "haves" and "have-nots" is one of the greatest challenges to partnership building. Without equal opportunities for input and feedback, the partnership can become lopsided and begin to focus on one partner's area of concern over that of the goals of the partnership as a whole. Finding *level,* not common, ground through the pooling of resources that enable all partners to participate fully, with equitable responsibility to and accountability for the project is an essential element of a true collaborative partnership.

6. Use market research to tailor your message, identify your media, and attract an audience.

In developing interest in and resources for promoting careers in special education, recruiters must understand the power of appropriate and strategically planned media messages. Identifying the audience one wishes to engage, as well as understanding the nature of the community in which the message is being conveyed, is the first step in recruitment. Use of community leaders as spokespersons for your initiative and securing the cooperation of both media outlets and local political leaders is essential to a successful media campaign. Look for community voices (e.g., specific newspaper, radio, and television outlets) within the audience you want to attract to sponsor your message. They can be a powerful influence over a community that knows and respects their voices. Make sure the message you are communicating is one that can be easily understood by the community. Respect local culture by being aware of native language usage. When developing and implementing all initiatives, use culturally relevant images and language to establish a sense of oneness with the audience you are seeking to attract.

7. Expand on a good thing by:

- *enlarging participation,*
- *seeking publicity, and*
- *looking for corrective action.*

Once the partnership is well underway and project activities have begun, it is time to look for additional resources and possible partners to fill identified gaps in needed resources. Look for partners who will view the initiatives as solutions to their own needs. Often, initial partners are the best recruiters of additional partners. Initial partners are capable of identifying what strategies were more successful than others. Seek publicity to advertise these successes and continue to solicit participation from additional outside sources, especially from those in the surrounding business community. This is also a good time to look for practices you engaged in that need to be terminated because they have not been productive or have not meshed well with the practices most commonly used by partners. Build on strengths – those activities and relationships that are working for you – instead of trying to *make* activities work when they are not compatible with the project.

8. Evaluate results, regroup, and go at it again.

Ongoing evaluation is at the heart of any successful collaborative partnership. Collect data from the beginning of the project, taking the extra time to ensure that all partners have committed to data collection procedures and agreed to maintain accurate records of the impact of your project. Make sure all partners realize that, with this important data in hand, they can make strategic changes in their collaborative activities. Use your evaluation information to challenge businesses and public agencies to take an active role in partnering . . . after all, the future you are creating is in their best interest, too!

Look for new partner groups and strategies that may have emerged during the first stages of your project and move forward with additional partners and new ideas for how the partnership can address the needs of the community.

9. Start planning for Next Steps, now!

- *Consider additional products to be developed, and*
- *Go after more resources from big business.*

Planning for next steps in the partnership project should be an ongoing process that constantly forecasts future needs and resources. What new products will need to be developed to address the changing demographics of your community? What new resources will you need in order to solicit business support for your growing partner membership and activity plans? Visit other sites that have been engaged in similar work for a longer period of time. Share success stories and glean ideas regarding business collaborations. Approach foundations that specialize in educational funding and community action programs. Share your concerns about the quality and quantity of special education teachers in their neighborhood schools. Help them to understand that the problem of teacher shortages ultimately produces a problem for them in the lack of qualified, competent workers in their stores and factories.

Together, communities, schools, agencies, and individuals can make a difference in the lives of children and youth with disabilities. Collaborative partnerships are one way that all can contribute to developing a special education workforce that meets the needs of children and youth with disabilities.

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